

The Failure of Western Feminism When It's Most Needed



by Phyllis Chesler

On Nov. 25, the [United Nations](#) initiated its annual Sixteen Days of Global Activism Against Gender-Based Violence against women and girls. This will continue until Dec. 10, which is Human Rights Day.

My people are the feminists at the UN. They also head NGOs, occupy chairs at foundations, human rights organizations, national women's organizations, and Women's Studies/Gender Studies departments, and are prominent Talking Heads in the media. For eight whole weeks, they have remained silent about the genocidal rapes of Israeli women on Oct. 7.

Some of these women once waged brave and determined battles against rape, incest, and domestic violence; supported the #MeToo Movement; and at least issued statements condemning the rapes of women in Bosnia, Rwanda, Sudan, and the Yazidi women

who were kidnapped by ISIS.

They also supported the idea that [rape is a war crime](#), at least in a battle zone.

However, these once visionary feminists have not only betrayed Israeli women – they have also betrayed women of color who live under Sharia law.

Most have remained relatively silent about the normalized mistreatment of Muslim women in Muslim countries and communities. They have not organized campaigns to end forced face veiling, polygamy, child marriage, routine girl- and woman-battering, or honor killing (femicide), either in foreign countries or in the West.

Why? Even though the victims of such injustices are primarily women of color, Western feminists have been very cautious about accusing men of color, especially men whose countries may once have been colonized, of crimes. They fear doing so might be seen as “racist.” Or “Islamophobic.”

Worse, some feminists in the West have actually [glorified](#) the forced wearing of the Islamic veil as a form of anti-colonial resistance. During the [Women’s March](#) in Washington, some women fashioned hijab out of American flags. Many anti-Israel rallies and marches feature both women and men, leftists and Muslims, sporting Palestinian keffiyehs as a way to signal their support – for the oppression of women.

They do so even as the brave girls and women in Afghanistan and [Iran](#) are risking death for the right *not* to be [forced](#) by the state, the mullahs, or their families to wear hijab, niqab, or burqas. These women and their male allies have led demonstrations for which they have been beaten, arrested, raped, and murdered.

I have [conducted](#) and [published](#) four [academic studies](#) about honor killing. Most academic feminists in the West, including

our icons, have never acknowledged this work about femicide. I delivered some of my initial findings at a G8 conference in Rome in 2008 and at the New York Supreme Court in 2010. This work also qualified me as an expert witness in cases in which women in flight from the threat of honor killings are applying for political asylum in America.

My strongest supporters, and those who actually read, cite, and use this work are, of course, women and men of color who live in the Arab Middle East and in central Asia (Pakistan, Turkey, Afghanistan, India, etc.).

I was once held captive in Kabul long ago. I'd gone there willingly but unwisely as a [bride](#), and I found myself trapped in the 10th century without a passport back to the future.

Therefore, when my friend and colleague, Mandy Sanghera – the British-Indian human rights activist – called to ask whether I wanted to co-lead a grassroots team to rescue women from Afghanistan, I said, “I’ve been waiting for this opportunity for decades.”

Together, our team rescued [400 Afghan women](#) in 2021. I’ve taken personal responsibility for a brilliant young Afghan woman who is now flourishing in graduate school in America.

Talk about sisterhood! When Mandy learned that my presentation about my honor killing studies had been canceled by an American law school, she swiftly convened a panel on the subject at University College London so that I could present my findings. At the time, she said that she could “not accept that such important work had been so dishonored.”

The good news: Feminism exists among communities of color, including Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh anti-Islamists both in the West and abroad.

In fact, it is mainly anti-Islamist Muslim feminists, both women and men, who have been raising the alarm on behalf of

Muslim women.

Like the Israeli women, they are also frustrated and puzzled by the Western feminist silence about Islamic gender apartheid. I have been privileged to know and work with many of these heroes.

In 2008, in Rome, I presented my preliminary findings at a G8 conference. I had the honor of bonding with a group of Muslim feminists, both religious and secular, over our many shared concerns. They told me that they had felt “abandoned” by Western feminists who refused to take a stand on issues such as honor killing, forced veiling, and the subordination of women – lest they be considered “racists” or “Islamophobes.” Many of these women were wearing hijab (headscarves) and they were all fearless, energized, and fabulously feminist.

That is where I first met Turkish-German feminist lawyer and now imam, [Seyran Ates](#).

Seyran’s work on behalf of Muslim women has earned her the hatred of Muslim male (and female) Islamists. In 1984, she was shot three times for providing legal counsel to abused Muslim girls; her client, a 15-year-old, was murdered. Seyran expressed her dismay that, in addition to being preyed upon by Muslim fundamentalists, Western leftists and feminists had discredited her work. “They call me a racist and an Islamophobe, too,” she said, “and I am a religious Muslim.”

Seyran is not alone. I am also talking about [Qanta Ahmed](#), [Dalia Al-Aquidi](#), [Ayaan Hirsi Ali](#), [Soraya Deen](#), [Manda Ervin](#), [Yasmine Mohammed](#), [Asra Nomani](#), and [Raheel Raza](#).

There are also Muslim and ex-Muslim men who are standing for women’s rights in the Muslim world such as [Ali Alyami](#), [Bassem Eid](#), [Zhudi Jasser](#), [Khaled Abu Tomeh](#), and [Ibn Warraq](#).

They all write articles, they publish books, they appear in the media. Please follow them. I am honored to be among them

as one of the founding members of the [Clarity Coalition](#) – Champions for Liberty Against The Reality of Islamist Tyranny.

This coalition has publicly condemned Jihad as well as Hamas' terrorist attack against Israel. They are all defending Western civilization and universal, post-Enlightenment values.

I stand with them. These are the feminists whom I recognize as such.

Today's world needs real feminism as never before. A politically correct, identity-obsessed version of Marxism will not do.

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